



# Newsday

## LONG ISLAND

4 LONG ISLAND

UP-TO-THE-MINUTE UPDATES

NEWSDAY.COM/LI



# Far from ready for a disaster

■ A survey of 200 voters finds less than 15% of LI households are prepared for a potential catastrophe

BY JOIE TYRRELL

joie.tyrrell@newsday.com

The lights go out. A hurricane pounds the Island. There's an outbreak of highly contagious flu. Terrorists have attacked New York City.

Are we ready?

Experts grappled with that question yesterday at a Catastrophe Readiness program in Centereach, saying readiness for a major storm or other disaster is more important than ever in the post-Katrina and post-9/11 era.

"We are in theory overdue [for a hurricane]," said Matthew Crosson, president of the Long Island Association, the Island's largest business group. "Somewhere along the line . . . it's going to happen."

Yet a recent survey of 200 registered voters conducted by the Middle Country Library showed that they believed that less than 15 percent of average Long Island households are prepared to deal with a potential catastrophe.

## Tough grilling on NYC level of preparedness

Amid a summer punctuated by minor disasters and purported terrorist threats, members of the State Senate's committee on homeland security yesterday grilled federal and local officials about New York City's most vulnerable areas.

The public hearing held at Fort Hamilton in Brooklyn focused on how the city would handle emergencies ranging from a major bridge collapse to a terrorist attack and hurricane evacuations.

Assistant Chief John Colgan of the New York Police Department's counter-terrorism unit defended the city's response last weekend to a false radiological threat, which turned out to

The survey of Centereach and Selden residents also found more than three-quarters of respondents think a catastrophe is imminent.

be based on a questionably sourced Israeli Internet article.

"We are not going to pooh-pooh or dismiss reporting that comes out at the other side of the world that might be exaggerated or inaccurate," he said.

Brig. Gen. David Shepard, director of the New York State Office of Homeland Security, assured the senators his office was ready to handle any event.

Sens. Martin Golden (R-Brooklyn) and Vincent Leibel (R-Carmel) honed in on what they said was one of the city's weakest areas of preparation — emptying the city of its residents if a major storm strikes.

— LAUREN MCSHERRY  
ZACHARY R. DOWDY

"Everybody says they're prepared, but they're not," said Albert DeStefano, a salesman for Generation Power Systems, residential standby gen-

erators, who was at the event.

Officials from Suffolk emergency management, LIPA, Stony Brook University Medical Center, Allstate, Suffolk Police and the National Weather Service shared worst-case scenarios as well as readiness tips for both businesses and residents. About 100 people attended the second annual forum of its kind at the Middle Country library, which hosts a permanent catastrophe clearinghouse aimed to educate the public.

If a hurricane strikes, LIPA spokesman Bert Cunningham explained that a Category 1 storm could mean up to nine days without power. A category four could wipe out the system.

"Now is the time to do your planning," Cunningham said.

The library's Catastrophe Readiness Clearinghouse, sponsored by a grant from the Allstate Foundation, provides tools for families, individuals, and small businesses for catastrophic events.

Residents browsed through biohazard suits and go-bag emergency kits at the catastrophe fair after the seminar.

Cheryl Williams, 50, of Wheatley Heights, clutched a packet of information on how to evacuate her pet chihuahua,

Angel. "I had never thought about how to keep my pet safe," Williams said.

While hurricane readiness made up the majority of the presentation, panelists also spoke about a potential pandemic flu and possible terrorist activity.

Sgt. James Caiaccia, emergency management commander of the Suffolk police, said terrorism can happen here.

"It's not so much we have a big target on Long Island — and they are looking for big names — it doesn't mean they are not here," he said, adding they could use Suffolk as a training or staging area.

Susan Donelan, director of the Department of Healthcare Epidemiology at Stony Brook University Medical Center, said pandemic flu could affect 1 million Long Islanders.

Library Director Sandy Feinberg said the presentation should resonate with residents. "They may not go home and get a go-bag," she said, "but it does start them thinking."

### How to be ready

Newsday disaster guide provides emergency contact numbers and other tips.

A33